

Clinton Dynasty Revisited

Journalist and author Doug Henwood says Hillary Clinton has close ties to Wall Street and big business, hawkish foreign policy, and a lack of vision to address looming structural economic and environmental catastrophes - *March 2, 2015*

Transcript

SHARMINI PERIES, EXEC. PRODUCER, TRNN: Welcome to The Real News Network. I'm Sharmini Peries, coming to you from Baltimore.

In a Harper's Magazine cover story, our next guest, Doug Henwood, titled his piece "Stop Hillary! Vote No to a Clinton Dynasty".

Now joining us from New York, New York, is Doug Henwood. Doug is the founder and editor of The Left Business Observer. His most recent book is After the New Economy.

Thank you so much for joining us, Doug.

DOUG HENWOOD, FOUNDER, LEFT BUSINESS OBSERVER: Thanks for having me.

PERIES: Doug, you've written a scathing criticism of Hillary. What do you say to those who say it's her time, her turn for a woman to lead this country?

HENWOOD: Well, I guess it is time for a woman to lead this country. We've had almost 50 presidents, none of them a woman yet. But I think that seems to be her sole qualification at this point.

It's remarkable. I tried to get a number of people, pundits, writers, people like that who've written in favor of Hillary for many, many years to make an argument, a positive argument for her becoming president, and they all really evaded my questions. They got really nasty and patronizing and condescending, accused me of all sorts of things. And I admittedly started out with a dislike of Hillary, and all the research I did didn't change my mind on that, but I thought the absence of a positive case for her, aside from the fact that she's a woman and it's her turn, were striking.

Her experience is grossly exaggerated. She was the first lady. She ran health care during the first Clinton administration, which turned out to be a disaster. When she was secretary of state, she was very, very boxed in by Obama, who ran foreign policy at the White House. So all she did was fly around a lot and do photo ops. But her substantive contributions were very hard to number. And when she was senator from New York, in between those two office holdings or whatever you want to call them, she concentrated on very, very small-bore things--renaming of local post offices after various worthies and things like that. But her legislative achievements were really nothing to write home about either.

So her experience, I think, is quite minimal, and her instincts are very frightening in some cases, especially on foreign policy. She is very, very hawkish, and she's almost always more hawkish than the Obama administration has been. And she's a woman, but if you look beyond that at her substantive experience and her policy preferences, she's really not, at least from my--.

PERIES: Let's have a look at those substantive experiences. As you just mentioned, one of her cornerstones during Bill Clinton's presidency was that she had care of health care. So how did she deliver on health care?

HENWOOD: Well, she didn't, really. She did it all very much in secret. She convened a relatively small panel of experts to put together a proposal, not in consultation with the public or with Congress. She was extremely paranoid and secretive about leaks. And she has been that way her whole life. She's extremely parsimonious with information. She doesn't want--.

PERIES: And you say she is economical with the truth, essentially.

HENWOOD: Yes. She [crosstalk]

PERIES: That means that she's been lying. Yeah.

HENWOOD: [crosstalk] to put it more bluntly. But she also just doesn't want leaks. When she first got into the White House, there used to be this corridor through which the press would go from the press room into the executive offices of the White House. She had that shut down. So her instincts are very secretive. And now we've had plenty of secrecy in government, an increase in secrecy in government over the last ten, 15 years. The last thing we need is someone with even more instincts along those lines.

But getting back to her health care thing, she did it very secretly, in consultation with almost no one. She alienated a lot of very powerful people in the Senate because of her arrogance. I'm not saying that senators should be admired or flattered, but it's really not the way to get anything done politically in Washington. She also made no effort to appeal to a broader public, maybe to get any around any obstacles that might be in the Senate. It was all a big disaster, and it really discredited her. And after the first couple of years that she devoted to health care and it failed--and it failed miserably--she then retreated to very, very small things--a lot of photo ops, which was very much like her Secretary of State career--symbolic things, promoting the interests of girls and women, but nothing much of substance. And so this last six years she spent around the White House when she wasn't dealing with the scandals of her husband's running around, she didn't do much of anything. So her record as first lady is not terribly impressive.

PERIES: And what's her record in-Senate?

HENWOOD: Well, picking up on her hawkishness, two of the first things she did when she got to the Senate, aside from making friends with the Republicans, many of whom were the very people who tried to impeach her husband, she made a beeline for the Armed Services Committee because she wanted to get a reputation as being tough on foreign policy, being in love with the military.

Even when she was in college, she tried to join the Marines, she wrote a letter and tried to join the Marines, and the Marines told her, no, we're not interested in women at this point. But she's got this lifelong love affair with hard men with guns, as she put it. And unfortunately, I think that continues to the present.

There are a lot of the neoconservatives from the Bush years who've been disenchanted by Obama's somewhat less hawkish foreign policy, but also by the rise of the neo-isolationists in the Republican Party like Rand Paul. A lot of these guys are talking about endorsing Hillary for president. So you have many of the architects of the Iraq War are expressing interest in getting behind her.

Her vote on the Iraq War was a true scandal. She is somebody who reads everything. She's very thoughtful. I've been disparaging of her, but I want to say she is very intelligent and very hard-working. I want to, like, call her anything other than that. But she deliberately did not read the national intelligence estimate on Iraq. And that, the full national intelligence estimate, the classified one, which is very different from what was released, the sanitized version, to the public, the full version expressed great skepticism about the weapons of mass destruction line in Iraq. Bob Graham, I think, was the only member of the Senate that actually read it, and he voted against the Iraq War resolution because of that. She deliberately did not read that, because one can only conclude that she did not want to learn that the official line was a lie.

She was even closer--she's very close to the Bush administration on the line that Saddam Hussein was close to al-Qaeda and had something to do with 9/11. She really is very, very hawkish, and has been for a

long time, and has never really apologized for her vote for the Iraq War. I think her judgment of these things, whether it's a combination of instinct or a political calculation to appear tougher than wimpy Democrats remitting to compensate for the fact that people might think she's soft because she's a woman. But whatever the reasons, she really loves arms.

PERIES: Right. And that was very evident in the run-up to the 2008 election and her position on Iran. And actually, at this time this is a very sensitive issue, as Iran is required for the war on ISIS in the region, and they have been actually playing a positive role in helping the coalition forces in fighting back the IS. How do you think she will come down on Iran in the coming years if she's president?

HENWOOD: Well, as you say, the politics of that get dicey, because at this point Iran looks better than some of the alternatives, even for a very hard-headed realpolitik point of view.

But she is also very close to the Israeli hawks. She's closer to Netanyahu than just about any other Democrat is. Most Democrats think that Netanyahu—they're certainly not critics of Israel in any structural fashion, but most of them find Netanyahu a little scary and extreme. Not her. She's close to the Likud crowd. So whatever—I think she will probably follow the line on Iran in that case, which is that this is an existential threat to Israel, and therefore we have to do everything we can to squeeze Iran. And even though there are some more scary alternatives to Iran at this point, I think she'll probably follow the line on that.

PERIES: Right. Do you plan to continue coverage of Hillary Clinton's candidacy leading up to the 2016 elections?

HENWOOD: Well, I do aspire to have a little industry of being the anti-Hillary. There are certainly people who hate her for a lot of the wrong reasons. There are people who think that she's some sort of liberal, especially liberal. She supported Bill Clinton's repeal of welfare. There are people who hate her for being a woman, which is repulsive and preposterous. There are right-wingers who just hate her because they think she's far more liberal than she is. I reject all those reasons for not liking Hillary. I don't like her because I think she's a centrist, an unprincipled person, a liar, and very unethical. And we haven't even talked about all the scandals that—.

PERIES: This is true. But more importantly, Doug, you wrote we desperately need a new political economy, one that features equal distribution of income, invest in our rotting social and fiscal infrastructure, and more humane ethics. Your arguments for why she wouldn't deliver on such economic plan?

HENWOOD: Well, I think she's not interested in that sort of thing. And I'm thinking there a couple of things that really distressed me about her popularity and her apparent inevitability. One is just the fact, do we really need another Clinton-Bush race? I mean, really, this country has got some sort of compulsion to repeat [incompr.] we've got anemia or just sclerotic or whatever medical metaphor you want to use. But the other is that she is very close to Wall Street. She was one of the creators of this new Democrat politics, which is business-friendly and very skeptical about social welfare, public infrastructure, public spending.

This is not what we need right now. These politics are old, old, old, and we are in the midst of a really structural economic crisis. Things look a little better, things have recovered some, but there are real very serious structural problems for the longer-term—polarization, stagnation of income, low levels of real investment. And we need a much more active public sector. And, of course, dealing with climate change, you require a much more active public sector. And she is not the person to deliver that. She has become even more close to Wall Street than she ever was. She is likely to raise, people say, as much as \$1 billion for a presidential campaign, and much of that would come from Wall Street and other financial interests.

So that is not what we need right now. We are sick to death of market deregulation and financial domination and polarization and instability. And we need a change. And I think she needs represents the same old thing.

When she and Bill Clinton created the new Democrats 20-some years ago, they weren't my cup of tea, but at least they were somewhat novel. Now they're really old news and we need to move on from that.

PERIES: Right. And then, finally, you just mentioned climate change, environmental issues. How do you think she will come down on that?

HENWOOD: Well, she says some things occasionally about it, but it would require--dealing with that stuff requires stepping on the toes of big business and big money, and she is not the person to do that. She just is not a visionary by any means. And we need someone who is a visionary with great political skills. I think she is neither a visionary nor a skilled political tactician, and she is just a kind of a small-bore kind of person. And that is not what we need right now. We need some big thinking and big politics to get out of this climate catastrophe. Otherwise, where I'm sitting will be covered in water in a couple of decades.

PERIES: Doug, I thank you so much for joining us today.

HENWOOD: My pleasure. Anytime.

PERIES: And thank you for joining us on The Real News Network.

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